THE

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DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. IV. April 22, 1938 Nisan 21, 5698 No. 5

Editorials

THE ETERNAL PROMISE OF PESAH
THE TIME TO ACT

A JEWISH LABOR TEMPLE

by HARRY ESSRIG

RABBI 1938

by JAY I. GOLDIN

Correspondence

ON COOPERATION WITH COMMUNISTS
MORE ON THE Z.O.A. SITUATION

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200

EDITORIALS

The Eternal Promise of Pesah

"IN every generation we are obliged to consider ourselves as having personally participated in the exodus from Egypt." In these words the Pesah Haggadah expresses a thought that has important implications for our relation to Jewish tradition in general. Tradition must function as an extention of memory. It is valueless save as it can fortify us to meet the challenge of present experience.

To treat the story of the exodus in this manner demands a reinterpretation of the narrative in the light of modern needs. Unless it can bring some measure of solace, encouragement or guidance to the Jewish people that today finds itself again in bondage in most parts of the world, we may as well not rehearse the ancient tale. Certainly we can no longer derive from its reading the hope born of faith in miraculous intervention. We cannot expect the waters of the Rhine or the Danube to be changed to blood in order to coerce the Pharaoh of Berlin to let the Hebrews of Germany and Austria go. Modern man does not believe in fairy tales. But there is one significant phrase in the miraculous account which is fraught with hopeful meaning for us today. It is that which refers the ultimate outcome to God's hardening of the heart of Pharaoh. Implied in this statement is the thought that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was itself a contributing factor to his downfall, and that this was not accidental but conformed to the operation of a divine law by which tyranny eventually writes its own doom.

The whole of Jewish history bears witness to that law. Our survival has not been due to our military, political or economic strength, for we were never one of the Great Powers. Rather was it due to the fact that our conquerors and oppressors overreached themselves and were destroyed, while we were redeemed in consequence. The God who delivered us from Egypt is the Power that assures everywhere the destruction of tyranny, because tyranny will not work. In his "Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion," Dr. Kaplan calls this law "the divine dialectic of freedom" and describes its operation in these words:

"How does this come about? By means of that inner contradiction which developes in human bondage. Those in the master class over-reach themselves in their desire to exploit their slaves for purposes in which the latter have neither share nor lot. Before long they fail to afford them even that minimum of security for which their slaves forego their freedom. It is then that those in the slave class are compelled to rise in revolt and strike out for freedom."

This is the promise of the Passover: "this it is that availed for our fathers and

for us, for not one alone rose up against us to destroy us, but in every generation men rise up against us to destroy us but the Holy One, blessed be He, delivers us out of their hands." How long the Hitlers and Mussolinis will prevail, none can say; how long the toiling masses everywhere will be exploited in the interest of the possessing few, none can say. But the tyranny cannot last forever, for the masters have defied the Eternal, and they must eventually share the doom of Pharaoh. One does not have to believe in miracles to hold fast to this faith.

The Time To Act

THE Jews of America are at this moment bewildered and dismayed over the fate that has befallen their European brethren and over the insecurity of their own position. But their confusion and distress are by no means entirely the product of forces external to the Jewish group. In no slight measure they spring also from a recognition that American Jewry is dealing incompetently with the problems before it.

An adequate treatment of these critical issues would demand the following steps:

First: The establishment of a centralized agency to resist the propaganda of anti-Semitism that threatens so seriously the welfare of the Jews of this country.

Second: The establishment of some instrument to educate the American people to a proper understanding and evaluation of the Jewish group.

It is apparent that it is not sufficient merely to deny anti-Semitic libels. An integrated effort at positive education is clearly indicated. There are among American Jews men of distinction in the field of publicity and propaganda. Their abilities should be channelized through the press, the radio, the movies, through a flood of pamphlets and a stream of speakers in order to immunize the Gentile mind against infection by the virus of bigotry.

Third: The establishment of an agency to deal systematically with the problem of the economic maladjustment of the Jewish group and that of economic exclusion.

Fourth: The establishment of a unified agency on behalf of the persecuted Jewries of Europe. The moral weight of American Jewry will be all the greater if unified. The questions of immigration and relief can be handled the more effectively under central auspices.

At the moment the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the B'nai B'rith have all taken upon themselves these tasks. But despite the efforts of the three of them there are some problems which get no treatment at all, and others which are being handled diversely, even competitively, by these national bodies.

The consequences are what might be expected: inefficiency, a lack of significant achievement, bickering between these organizations, the encouragement of unauthorized statements and actions by irresponsible persons, the frittering away, in heated internal controversies, of Jewish energies which might have been employed to better purpose. But the most disastrous result is the effect on Jewish morale. The Jews of America have been discouraged and shaken by lack of policy in some areas of vital import, by the conflict of policy in others, by the absence of unity and integration, by being torn between mutually contradictory programs, by frequent exhibitions of irresponsibility. They are as a result passing into a paralysis of impotence. And yet they are a group possessed of resources, human, intellectual, financial and social, which if properly utilized might go far toward the solution of the problems which overshadow them.

Obviously what is needed is some deliberative body which shall truly represent the whole of American Jewry, which shall authoritatively determine procedures for it, and which shall muster its integra-

ted powers to their successful materialization.

To this end, and as an inevitable though temporary expedient, the following program suggests itself.

First: That under the joint auspices of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith there be convoked a National Conference of the Jews of America to whose authority these organizations shall voluntarily subordinate themselves.

Second: That into this National Conference there be invited representatives of other National Jewish organizations such as the various rabbinical councils, synagogue federations, social service agencies, Jewish labor groups, Zionist and Yiddishist associations.

Such a National Conference would be admittedly self-constituted and without a direct mandate from American Jewry. But if the base of organizational representation be broad enough, it would from its very inception possess a measure of moral authority such as no agency existing at present could claim. By its very existence, it would inhibit irresponsible utterance by individuals and groups.

Immediately upon being instituted and until a more permanent structure could be established, the National Conference would address itself to problems listed above and to the procedures suggested in connection with them.

But, as we have already indicated, such a National Conference would be at best an emergency measure. If there is to be, in the administration of the affairs of American Jewry, abiding coordination, democracy and responsibility, a permanent structure must be built, one which has its basis in all the Jews of all the Jewish communities of this country.

To this end, we suggest that the proposed National Conference, as soon as it is constituted, speed the organization of the Jews of each community into democratic, authoritative units. The first steps in this direction have already been taken. In cities like Harrisburg, Cleveland and Detroit, Jewish communal councils have been established, universal in their character in that they embrace all elements in these communities, democratic and authoritative at once in that, deriving their sanction from all the members of these communities, they alone may speak with justice on their behalf.

Once a large part of the Jewish communities of America have been so organized, their representatives can constitute the permanent National Conference of the Jews of America. Thus integration and centralization of Jewish effort shall have been attained. And the Jews of this country shall have created a proper instrument for dealing with their special problems.

This program is presented with a full awareness of the difficulties involved in its realization: the differences, personal and ideological, present among the leaders of organizations already existent. But the choice before them is unmistakable. They can either continue as they have in the past, with a further demoralization of American Jewry and a continued diffusion of its abilities—or they can proceed toward integration.

Do these leaders fear that once the National Conference is established they shall in all conscience be incapable of agreement? But which is the more desirable condition: that their differences continue to be aired publicly to the distress and confounding of American Jewry, or that they be exchanged about a conference table? At least out of the latter condition agreements of compromise may emerge.

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST entertains no naive confidence that even integrated efforts can solve the problems that face Jews and dissolve the threats that overshadow their lives. But it is convinced that the effort ought to be made, under the best possible auspices—with all of Jewish strength rallied and directed through carefully selected techniques toward predetermined objectives. If then

American Israel fails in some area of its endeavors, it shall at least possess the satisfying knowledge that its failure does not spring from its neglect.

Centuries ago, in another hour of trial, a great leader of Israel rallied its latent forces with the slogan *"Et Laasot L'Adonai!"* "It is the time to act for the Lord." In this spirit THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST presents this program to American Jewry.

A Jewish Labor Temple

By HARRY ESSRIG*

Religion Makes Overtures

RELIGION is called upon to make constant adjustment to the shifting trends of thought and cataclysmic social and economic movements that mark society's quest for security and happiness. Thus it was within recent times that religious leaders were besought to square the truths and insights of their respective faiths with the findings of the laboratory and microscope. However, what was once an impasse has apparently been overcome. Even scientists are now scanning the wide expanse of the nebular spaces for the God they had previously exiled from the affairs of the universe. Perhaps they have discovered the impotence of science in a decadent capitalist system, bent upon retrenchment and retrogression. Science no longer seems able to utter those profound truths about the progress of mankind, and thus, muddled and confused by its own debacle, it is also turning to the powers that be as a last straw for its ebbing confidence in man. In such a manner has a very interesting clash of mind and will come to an ignoble end.

However, another and mightier protagonist has arisen to challenge the role that religion may play in the life of society. Marxist philosophy has revealed the economic mainsprings of our thinking, unmasking the economic and social interests that lurk even behind the pure-white vestments of religious dogma and creed. Labor has grown skeptical of vague pronouncements and hopeful generalities. And thus religious leaders find themselves eager for a rapprochement with liberal thought, with the laboring masses, and with the new economic and social theories that threaten to engulf organized religion.

In the first place, they feel that religion has been misrepresented, that it is indeed a revolutionary as well as a conservative force, interested in material as well as spiritual welfare. Secondly, they believe that our vexing social and economic problems should be solved through the religious approach, which insists upon the avoidance of bloodshed in the reconstruction of the world. Cynics may interpret this sudden concern with the woes of mankind as an effort on the part of the clergy to woo the working class away from drastic revolutionary action or as an attempt to "jump on the bandwagon" of radicalism. For past experiences have shown that the stirring masses, awaking from the lethargy and stupor of capitalist exploitation and anxious to inherit this world, often turn against the church and synagogue—against those institutions that have often served as "dressed-up windows" for the system that oppressed them.

However, be that as it may, it is of great importance today to analyze the relationship of religion to labor, the concern of the church and the synagogue with the working class, and especially the institution which is the direct expression of this growing interest—the labor temple. After such preliminary investigation, we shall be in a position to pass judgment on the

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possibility and advisability of establishing a Jewish labor center.

Is Religion Friendly to Labor?

Progressive-minded religious leaders are today reiterating religion's amicability toward labor and emphasizing the democratic nature of the synagogue and church, which, though they be institutions sponsored by the class benefiting from the status quo, contain within them the seeds of rebellion for the pacific transfer of power from the "haves" to the "have nots." "The greatest friend of labor is the conscience of the world as it is enlightened by Christ," writes Robert Gooden, Suffragan Bishop of Los Angeles. The Church must be on the side of labor, he continues. "She must let the world know that she goes where the downtrodden worker is found; that she sympathizes with his efforts to better conditions of all his brother workers; that she is ready to take his part when he is plainly getting the worst of it." What nobler expression of sentiment could one hope for?

Similarly, religion and labor need each other, declares the National Religion and Labor Foundation, for the "social ideals of the churches and the aims of organized labor are strikingly similar." Both stand for a just economic order. A high ethical religion, furthermore, must contend for the removal of the causes of economic distress and strive for basic changes in the structure of society. This desire to build a better social order through the cooperation of religious and labor leaders is no myth. Many brave spirits are fighting against all odds to achieve this goal. And the path is strewed with many figures who have wrestled with this task and have been discarded by their parishioners who did not see eye to eye with them.

This feeling that the working class cannot be neglected by those who minister to well-fed souls has also made inroads among rabbis and laymen, as was revealed by Dr. Cronbach's pamphlet, "Social Outlook of Modern Judaism." That "social vision is the destiny of every religion" and "social needs are matters of religious concern" are proved by the preoccupation of the various bodies of rabbis and laymen with the economic and social questions of the day. This is further evidenced by the attitude of sincere sympathy with the plight of the working man, which at times penetrates to the very core of the present bankruptcy of society, eschewing mere ameliorative measures or dazzling panaceas. Religion no longer may bear the stigma of being "other-worldly." Pronouncements that bear directly upon the proletarian's problems, on hours and wages, on hygiene and safety in the factory, on the question of industrial democracy, civil liberties, etc., make their periodic appearances. Many churches have also established Social Justice Commissions, which have done yeoman work in clearing the ground for constructive social efforts. Yet, on the other hand, it is significant to observe that the more radical contingents of religious leaders, such as the Christian League for Industrial Democracy and the Methodist Federation for Social Service, have banded together to continue the struggle on the fringes of their ministerial associations. Thus, as far as vocal expression of views is concerned, little is wanting. Words, however, do not alone lift the chains from the hands of the exploited.

Yet, even religious leaders must be wary. That "a rabbi here and there occasionally gets into difficulties with his congregation because of his social heterodoxies" is stating the situation rather mildly. One rabbi has been forced to abdicate for inviting a delegation of Loyalist Spain to address a group in his city; another was challenged by his board for protesting a police raid on the Workers' Alliance Headquarters. On a still wider scale we find that the laity in the Reform movement has been watching with great apprehension the "left-wing" tendencies of its spiritual leaders. Thus, October 1936 witnessed a joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rab-

bis to work out a joint program of thought and action on social issues. Some regarded this as a submission of the rabbis to "a spanking from the rich laymen." Others interpreted this move as "an honest effort on the part of the laity and rabbinate to compose whatever differences in social thinking separated them." For the economic crisis had sharpened and intensified the conflicting tendencies between the two groups, and in order to prevent the breach from becoming unbridgeable, a unified policy and program were required. Whether the rabbis will now be tamed, or whether this will signalize the infusion of new spirit into the movement, we care not to predict. It is important to note, however, that the laity is fearful of having its leadership go too far afield. What may develop as the economic and social impasse reaches a more critical stage one cannot foretell.

Speaking generally, religious leaders are sympathetic in sentiment and mood to labor. But are pronouncements a safe guarantee for proper conduct in actual situations? Can they serve as barometers for the temper of spiritual leaders "under fire?" "A recent report on the social views of our religious leaders, issued by the National Religion and Labor Foundation, reveals a striking apathy on the part of our religious leaders toward social and economic issues." This report is based on the results of a questionnaire sent out in 1935 to 100,000 leaders of 22 major faiths and denominations. Only 4,700 replied. The survey showed that no church or synagogue would be offered for a strike meeting, nor does either institution make a point of dealing with trade unionists or with industries that employ union men. Furthermore, there is a vast difference between those who pledged themselves to act in the future and those who have actually taken such action in the past. Apparently, many ministers hold radical ideas, but their intentions in the social realm have not yet been translated into action. There is a vague, nebulous sympathy in the air which the religious leaders breathe; they are indeed motivated by religious love and prophetic social justice; but their sentiments are rarely embodied in concrete action. Why is that? Certainly religion as a whole does not frown upon it. Are the institutions, then, at fault? If prophetic social justice impels the rabbi to a liberal or radical position, is it then the synagogue which acts as a bridle upon his enthusiasm and keeps his passion for justice in check?

The Synagogue and the Working Man

The synagogue has been censured as an institution of the middle class, molded by the views of the parishioners and siding with their interests. It is not a simple task to evaluate the validity of such criticism, although some may find food for thought in the analysis of the occupations of Reform Jews in the large cities, which formed part of a study by Dr. Franzblau, issued in 1930. The survey revealed that "about 17 per cent of the entire group are professional men. About 43 per cent are in business for themselves and about 15 per cent are employees. 25 per cent of our responders indicated no occupation or designated themselves as retired. It is apparent therefore that the membership of our Reform temples in the larger cities is recruited almost exclusively from among those groups whose financial status is better-than-average." We wonder if Conservative synagogues can show a greater abundance of working people in their midst. As for the Orthodox, their membership is drawn as a whole from the poorer strata of Jewry. Yet who will contend that the proletarians are flocking to that type of shule?

The impression is inescapable that the synagogue is essentially a class institution, frequented by Jews of some means, controlled by men who have made their mark in the professional or commercial realm, and geared to a very static philosophy of life. "The rabbi is paid to extol the virtues of a middle-class heaven," concluded a young radical cleric. As a result, the pressing social problems of the day do not enter the focus of the synagogue,

and the rabbi is committed to a gentle pinkish liberalism, "which acts as a mild catharsis for the well-to-do and well-meaning." With the slow ripening of fascist seeds in this country, spiritual leaders may soon be even deprived of such a luxury. Retrenchment is coming into the saddle in public life. Even the religious domain may be stormed one of these days, and demands be made for the expulsion of radical devils.

Several attempts have been made to discover the reason why the proletarian element stayed away from the synagogue. In this respect the Central Conference took the first steps, analyzing the shortcomings of the Reform Temple in its relationship to the workers, in a courageous manner. Conservative leaders have not as yet become critical of their institution nor do the rabbis appear to be very questioning. The Orthodox, on the other hand, seem chained to a philosophy of acquiescence with the status quo of the religious as well as the social-economic realm.

"The facts indicate that the American Reform synagogue is to an excessive degree a financial and aristocratic institution," declared Rabbi Louis Witt in an address delivered before the C.C.A.R. in 1911. It makes money rather than piety the condition of membership. This criticism may be levelled against all synagogues where the entrance fees are highly prohibitive and a voice in the conduct of the congregational affairs is limited only to people of affluence and wealth. The principle of democracy is not yet fully established in those places of worship where men are rated and classified according to financial standing, where the proximity to the ark of God is sold at a high premium, where wealth is enthroned in honors and in the recital of memorial prayers for the dead. There are congregations that are "exclusive, fashionable, and undemocratic, entirely out of proportion with the ideals they profess," in which the assigned pew is the "index of a man's financial standing," and where seats may be reserved as in the theatre. True, many of these abuses may be removed; the minimum assessment and the assigned pew may be abolished, while the ballot could be extended to each assessment, no matter how small. Yet would this entirely obviate the objections that many workers have to frequenting the synagogue? Is not the working man's antipathy to the religious institution more fundamental?

The worker's discontent with the synagogue may be found in the fact that it is far removed from his life. Though some may claim that the "ideals of the masses were conceived and promulgated in the synagogue," it is true that Jewish spiritual leaders did not give concrete expression to the aspirations of the sweatshop toilers for decent hours and wages. Many immigrants who were forced to eke out a miserable living in the sweatshops were neglected, and to them the sumptuous Houses of Prayer represented "symbols of exploitation sanctified by a religion they had already begun to question." The intellectuals and liberals, however, who sprouted among the Jewish masses and who were "in revolt against the traditionalized and ritualized organization of Jewish life which kept the worker in such abject slavery without a murmur of protest, turned their attention to social and industrial problems, formed societies and trade unions, and were finally successful in winning the Jewish workers because they took a keen interest in their problems." (Israel Mufson).

The synagogue as it is now constituted does not attract the Jewish working class. But is there a place for an institution that will answer labor's needs, that will appeal to the Jewish toilers in the large cities, that will interpret religion for them in a modern, progressive light, as an active faith in the midst of a decaying capitalism, that will be dedicated to a clear-cut and well-formulated social point of view, and give spiritual elevation to labor in its struggle for material concerns, because it realizes that one may not speak of the Kingdom of Heaven before the worker is

emancipated from the Animal Kingdom of capitalist exploitation?

Before we can safely answer such a question, we ought first to examine the existing Christian Labor Temples, according to whose pattern our new synagogue may be molded. Let us examine their aims and the functions that they are fulfilling; then we may determine the feasibility of similar institutions in Jewish life.

What Is a Labor Temple?

The Labor Temple, on 14th Street and 2nd Avenue, New York City, is perhaps the oldest institution of its kind. Conceived to "reach industrial workers with the gospel of goodwill and brotherhood as taught by Jesus and the prophets," and maintained by the Presbyterian Church, it serves a community, largely foreign, of industrial workers and small storekeepers. About 17 different nationalities, among whom are to be found Jews as well, some of them fairly well-to-do, frequent this religious melting pot. All Europe is there, as it were, by proxy.

It was first organized by Charles Stelzle in 1910, who desired to hold services "which the workingman would like to attend." Open forums were conducted during the week, while a religious orthodox service took place on Sunday morning. Seventy-five per cent of the attendance was Jewish; fifty per cent was composed of radicals. The scope of the temple, however, expanded in consonance with the desires of the community; settlement work was begun; the lectures were organized into a "workingman's school"; trade union meetings were held in the quarters; the American International Church came into being, with special services for the Italian population.

A modern structure was erected in 1926, under the direction of Rev. Chaffee, who "tried to bring about a happy condition that the capitalist and worker should love each other and work together in the same church for the same Lord." Its philosophy was one of goodwill and belief in the people of the East Side. True democracy reigned, for all men were invited and everyone was heard. There the laborer was offered light on his problems and a chance to become acquainted with economics, art, music, etc.

At present Rev. Muste stands at the helm of the church. Muste, pacifist, labor organizer and radical, who has enjoyed a stormy career in the proletarian ranks, has returned to the church. He believes that unless the labor movement "is purified, deepened and spiritualized, it too will contribute to the dissolution rather than the redemption of our civilization." Convinced of the contribution that religion can make to the working class and especially to the Marxian adherents who stand in need of revaluating their philosophy and strategy, he has donned the cloth again to present the social message of the Christian Church in the heart of the metropolis.

Another type of such an institution is the Church of the People in Seattle, founded by Rev. Fred Shorter in 1934. Rev. Shorter believed along with a large company of his friends that the city needed an organized religious body that went beyond "the old frontier of theological liberalism to a new frontier of economic radicalism." As a result, the church advocates "the building of a cooperative commonwealth that will assure an abundant life for all," as well as supports strikes and joins in the picketing. It is a class-conscious church, made up of white-collar workers. Labor in the city is yet hesitant about supporting it, having been alienated so much. However, it is Rev. Shorter's hope that it can be won back by the courageous conduct on the part of religious leaders.

A more recent newcomer is the Cuyler Memorial Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, whose pastor is Rev. David Gory, a socialist candidate for office and the organizer of the Ministers' Union. It boasts of a membership of 290, all of whom are actively pro-union, five of whose deacons are members of unions, and fifty of whom belong to a cooperative store. One of the

elders was recently arrested for union activity in the N.B.C. strike. It is virtually a League of Nations, containing representatives of 22 different nationalities, of which the Scotch, Syrian and Swedish predominate. "The congregation is primarily interested in religion. The labor men like to belong to a church whose pastor and people are known to be friendly to their movement. However, they do not want labor sermons all the time," comments the Christian Century.

A Jewish Labor Temple?

It is now proper to discuss the possibility and advisability of a synagogue which the laboring element can rightly call its own, which will participate in its daily struggles and offer spiritual guidance and cultural stimulus at the same time. The new institution we envisage will vary in nature and composition from the traditional house of worship; it will not be a retarding force in the life of the workers and intellectuals who will gather around it as a nucleus of a new fellowship; it will become a dynamic, inspiring and active factor in the changing social scene. Even to think of erecting such an institution implies courage on the part of a person who has grown accustomed to the familiar house of prayer and cannot conceive of a substitute for it. And yet we must dare; we must be willing to take chances and to fail. Perhaps out of the wreck of our dreams will arise a new structure, dedicated to all that is noble and true and significant in life.

A few progressive synagogues, that have endeavored to make of themselves functioning organs of the Jewish body, have already begun to question the functions that they are fulfilling in society. For the synagogue in this country has become less and less an educational agency and socializing institution; it has catered for the most part to the desire for mere Jewish fellowship, for mere social contact, interlarded with an occasional religious diatribe, tending to assume the aspects of a religious club, in the same sense that the athletic club attends to the physical needs of the membership. Although the changing scene of American Jewish life has called for adjustment and a different emphasis, the synagogue, by virtue of its nature as a middle-class insituation, has not reacted to the new demands, except for the few progressive congregations noted above.

The labor synagogue will have a social outlook and will be permeated with the social spirit. It will recognize its right to protest against every injustice and against every form of prejudice. As the present economic order begins to break up and the crisis becomes more acute, it will take a more active part in the shaping of the new social order, along with other purely secular agencies. It will look with favor upon the struggle of the worker, professional and small merchant for the good life; it will endeavor to give more than tacit approval to the rights of labor as guaranteed by the law, and will take a definite stand in the interests of peace and democracy. Thus it will leaven the inner religious spirit, that often tends to strive for mere individual expression, and will, at the same time, infuse into the labor movement that spiritual intensity and ethical content which alone can vouchsafe the redemption of our fallen civilization.

The labor temple must reinterpret the three functions of the traditional synagogue: social service, education and worship. All three will be equal to and coordinate with each other. And all three will have been revitalized by the application of new criteria and a wider scope. The social service usually engaged in by the well-to-do synagogues often smacks of the "good deed"; it is surrounded with the aroma of charity and goodwill. It usually does not encompass the larger social problems: the corruption in government, the injustices in our economic organization, and the grave international dilemmas. It is mostly concerned with half-hearted ameliorative measures.

As for the extent and scope of the educational activities conducted by the present-day synagogue, little need be said, for we have failed to arouse our old as well as our young to an understanding of the Jewish environment, let alone the complex and overwhelming world scene. The cultural life of the synagogue is stagnant. We dally with forums and swoon over thrilling book reviews. Yet few come to grips with the serious problems of fascism, the abridgement of civil liberties, the development of unionization, etc. Finally, our worship services, despite previous efforts to charge the prayers with new significance, are still unsatisfactory to the mass of worshipers. They do not seem to well out of their needs; they do not appear to be attuned to their hidden yearnings. It is with each one of these three aspects that the labor temple will need to cope and struggle. To be successful, it will need to make a social service program, that will be geared to a philosophy of social change, a cultural program, that will educate the membership to the unique achievements of the Jewish people as well as to the perplexing and pressing social problems, and finally, it will aim to discover a new vehicle for our deep innermost hopes, a service that will be the highest expression of the religious spirit and of humanity's longing for a new order that is fair, honest and just.

Such an organization will maintain a firm contact with all Jewish movements that function amongst the masses of our people. It will find no group foreign to itself that aims to advance the majority of mankind along the road of justice and righteousness. It will remain aloof from sectarian lines and factional squabbles. It will cooperate with Jewish labor unions, in order to establish that rapport between religion and labor which alone can withstand the onslaught of Fascism and reaction. It will hope to extend the bonds of fellowship to all the oppressed of the earth, feeling that this noble impulse arises out of the very substance of our historical past. In truth, the new institution will be a prophet and protagonist of the new social order, in which justice will be meted out to all alike and the Jew will finally come into his own.

No doubt the membership will be recruited from the lower middle-class, from the petty traders and artisans, the professionals and workers, white-collar as well as industrial, and the unemployed. Fees will be at a minimum, so that all may enter who desire. Officers will be chosen on merit alone to guide the destinies and formulate the policies of the group. Not wealth will be enthroned but the true democratic spirit, which permits all to appear as equals before God. Naturally enough, the institution will be found only in a metropolitan center and will need to be located in the very heart of its population, close to the homes of its membership and thus, by mere physical proximity, exerting a deep influence over the lives and thought of the attendants. Other necessary details must remain to be worked out by the tireless, hopeful and aspiring individual who will pioneer in this most unique of all tasks.

Whether or not success will attend the venture of a labor temple no one knows. One thing is certain, however; it is time to call attention in the Jewish press to such a significant matter and to discuss the potentialities of such a novel step. Perhaps, out of such give-and-take, the dream will take on a clearer form and sharper image.

Rabbi 1938

By JAY I. GOLDIN*

THERE are only two months to graduation, and the anticipated excitement of the commencement exercises with their elaborate ceremony is gradually growing on every senior. Quite naturally, we are happy that we have successfully completed a four-year course of study. Natural too is our enthusiasm over the prospect of going to various communities to begin work for which we have been prepared, and to which we have eagerly looked forward for some time. But the joy is far from pure. It is a joy mixed very substantially with bewilderment. As a matter of fact, upon further reflection, we discover that the element of bewilderment by far outweighs our joy. For, in spite of the education we have received, and in spite of the occasions when we have engaged as student rabbis in the practical work of the ministry, we find that we are setting out for our positions with a pitiful confusion of ideas and attitudes concerning Jewish life, rather than with an intelligent philosophy or program for action. It is all very well to be equipped with noble intentions. But pious mistakes and muddles are as responsible for chaotic results as are less pretentious actions. There is a point in our activity where the nobility of our desire becomes a complete irrelevancy.

Unfortunately, this confused state of affairs is not limited to one particular group of graduates, nor to one particular seminary. In the frequent conversations and sessions with students from other schools, one fact has become ruthlessly apparent: no matter to what policy the respective schools are officially dedicated —be it Orthodoxy, Conservatism, or Reformism—the students all have in common only a stammering understanding of what they are to do. Perhaps the Yeshivah students are a bit more certain in their positive attitude towards the necessity of traditional observances; perhaps the students of the Reformist schools are not terribly disturbed by the neglect of these observances. Two things, however, are very sure: first, the Conservative men are the least definite in their statement or expectation of the direction Jewish life is to take; and second, all the men from all three schools have no clear pattern for the helter-skelter details within this Jewish life.

To accuse the schools of inefficiency—even if our criticism were attended to—would not be completely fair. Perhaps the different seminaries might have been more diligent in their analysis and formulation of the nature of Judaism. But the schools themselves are very largely the expressions of the Jewish community. A disorganized community will never produce organized institutions. An environment without wisdom cannot expect philosophical inhabitants.

Now, it so happens that, for the last few years, the younger rabbinical students have turned more and more to the Reconstructionist platform. Certainly this has been true of the younger rabbis of the Conservative movement. And because we have been most sympathetic towards the philosophy of the Reconstructionists, we have felt that it was from their leaders that we might expect direction. And what is it that the young rabbi of 1938 expects?

Essentially, there are three points on which he wants a definite statement.

First, what approach to Judaism is to be taken with the younger generation of Jews? Though Professor Kaplan has formulated very carefully his philosophy of Judaism as a civilization, our younger generation is still in need of a more rele-

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vant technique and approach for the realization of his ideal. True, Professor Kaplan was addressing himself both to the Jews of his generation and to ours. The point is, however, that our generation has had less of an attachment to traditional Jewish content and values than had the older generation. It may be difficult to change the habits and ideas of men who have lived within a certain pattern for many years. However, if they are identified with certain ways of life, they *can* be made to realize the need for change, for they possess the materials to be changed. Obviously, to reconstruct a tradition one must first have that tradition. The Jew, for example, who recognizes the importance of synagogue attendance may, though perhaps with difficulty, come to see that a synagogue service ought to be modified or revised. But the Jew who has never had an intense attachment to the synagogue has already lost that very necessary interest in the revitalizing of a traditional institution. Were there no synagogue, he would not even feel that something essential was lacking. How tell a man who feels no hunger that he is hungry? A pertinent illustration, of course, is the scene in Reformist Judaism today. It is not only the inadequacy of the original Reformist philosophy which is responsible for that very weak participation in Jewish life on the part of the younger Reformist Jews. This weak Judaism is the result, to a large extent, of the thin and shrunken heritage they received. To this very day, even the Reformist rabbinate largely recruits its members from the more traditional Jewish homes.

Second, what authoritative statement is to be made on Jewish law? We come here to a serious situation, namely, that Jewish tradition in its historical development has expressed itself to a considerable degree through law in one form or another. Granted that the Shulhan Arukh cannot be our determining guide today in all our needs, yet some sort of formulation on law is required. It may be a mark of liberality, for example, on the part of the Conservative rabbi to smile forgivingly to his congregant who smokes a cigarette outside the temple on the Sabbath. But the ridiculousness of the inconsistency is not lost even on the congregant. And with a friendly kind of laugh, he intimates that the rabbi is a charming freak of some sort. For the rabbi will not smoke on "shabbos" whereas he accepts the congregant's "violation" quite calmly. Similarly with the problem of kashrut. Perhaps it is unfortunate that the importance of kashrut has been overemphasized in Jewish life. Be that as it may, some clear position on the question ought to be arrived at. The grotesqueness of the rabbi munching vegetables at the "trefa" dinner party reduces the question to an indignity to which at no time it ought to fall, no matter what our opinion on the matter be.

Finally—and one is not at all sure that this last point does not deserve first mention—there is a very urgent need for a metaphysic of God in our philosophy of Judaism. It has been a great mistake to ignore this difficult problem until the present. As religious teachers, as rabbis who maintain that prayer is an important element in ritual, how shall we honestly preach about a God of whose nature we know nothing? The rhetorical platitudes to which religious teachers resort succeed only in making the confusion worse confounded. To tell people that when we fight for liberty or when we strive for the realization of the ideals of social justice, we are then establishing the kingdom of God, is not enough. The retort to such an explanation is only too familiar. Why pray to God if I do these things? Why participate in a religious service if I am already actively associated with leagues that are dedicated to the ideals of democracy? Why the synagogue if the particular "social problems" group functions more directly and consciously for the improvement of social conditions? Is not

the concept of a God superfluous in a philosophy of life where values are determined by human and social criteria? The question is eternal in the human mind—who or what is this God with whom we are told to commune? And ultimately the nature of our religion will really be determined by the nature of our God.

These are three points with which the graduating rabbi is essentially preoccupied. They are not the only questions. But they are probably the most important ones in his catalogue of *she-elot*. They have to be answered not only because the *young* rabbi is otherwise unprepared for his important work; but also because the significance of the *whole* rabbinate depends upon the answers.

Correspondence

ON COOPERATION WITH COMMUNISTS

Sirs:

Permit me to speak a brief word of disagreement with one of the suggestions of Louis Minsky in his thoughtful and thought-provoking essay on "Jewry and Democracy." It is all the more difficult to do so by virtue of the fact that I agree so heartily with his objectives and aims. Mr. Minsky is opposed to both communism and fascism; naturally, so am I. More than that, he would urge a positive program to promote and preserve democracy; so would I.

But I cannot agree with him that liberals must disavow all cooperation with communists to that end. In fact, it seems to me that such would be indeed a fundamental error, and that, in following his advice, we should be turning our backs on one of the most valuable lessons of recent history. If the tragic demise of post-war liberalism and socialism in countries like Germany and Austria proves anything at all, it is the utter and senseless futility of liberals and leftists fighting among themselves, the while reaction prevails. It is over the dissected body of the left that the extreme right steps to conquer. That is the whole justification and necessity for the Popular Front. Be the communist tactics what they may, the fact remains that at this precise moment communists and liberals alike in this country want desperately to preserve democracy. And at this precise moment democracy needs the united support of *all* who will defend her.

There would be much justification for Mr. Minsky's point of view if we faced an equal danger from both fascism and communism at the present time. But the danger is not equal. In spite of all that has transpired since 1929, the forces of communism in this country are still woefully weak; witness all statistics of elections. Outside of Mr. Hearst's nightmares and the purveyors of red herring, there is no real communist threat here. But there is a real and imminent and dangerous threat of fascism. In the face of that threat, it seems to me that we dare not be too "snobbish" about our company. When the threat of fascism has abated, or when the danger of communism has become real, I will join with Mr. Minsky. In the meantime, and especially at this critical moment, I want the help of *everyone* who is opposed to fascism.

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MORE ON THE Z.O.A. SITUATION

Sirs:

I have read with great interest Rabbi Blumenfield's analysis of the condition and problems of the Zionist organization of Chicago which appeared in the February 25th and March 11th issues of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST. By admitting that the Zionist organization was weak because it failed to serve the vital need for Jewish living in America, he has issued a clear-cut challenge to Zionism to revitalize itself. In his proposed solution, he has developed an excellent basis for a Palestine program, but has not given it the necessary completeness to render it a vital program to the Jew in America.

What would this "new" Zionist group have to offer to a member who considers fascism a definite menace to Jewish life in America, Palestine and the world over? Must he join another organization in addition to the Zionist organization? What if he recognizes the Jewish economic problem in the United States and would like to take positive action, must he join still another organization? Must the Zionist join other organizations in order to discuss and act on problems concerning the Jewish community and religious institutions in this country?

Is it not clear that a restricted concept of Zionism dooms the Jewish community to a multiplicity of organizations all of which a socially conscious Jew must join in order to carry through a complete and vital Jewish program? Was it not strange that the man who helped found the Z.O.A. should also organize and lead the parallel American Jewish Congress because there was no room in the Zionist movement for "Congress" activity? How

efficient can Jewish life be if it is to act through multiple leaderships and multiple groups?

The difficulty lies in the vague use of the term Zionism. In order to develop a Zionist program, we must understand the meaning of the concept Zionism. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the movement itself, we must not be content with a static definition of Zionism, but must develop a dynamic and flexible analysis which should be applicable to any situation in which the Jews live. It does not necessarily follow that a Zionist program for the Jew in Poland should be the same as a Zionist program in America. The Zionism that held for Russian Jewish immigrants into the United States may not be adequate for an American born Jewish generation.

Generally speaking, Zionism is an adjustment of the Jew to his environment. Of course, not every possible adjustment is a Zionist adjustment. When, however, the Jew concedes membership in the Jewish group, recognizes the national character of the Jewish people, and proposes a program aimed to insure the continued existence of this nationality, the adjustment can be called Zionistic. The type of Zionism evolved in any country therefore would depend first on the problem of the Jews in that country, and secondly on the situation of the Jews the world over.

The nature of this paper prohibits either a detailed analysis of the concept Zionism or a thorough study of the problem of the Jew. I should like, however, to offer a Zionist program for the Jews of America which might conceivably result from a rigid application of the above analysis.

The function of the Zionist Organization should be:

I. To present to the American Jewish Community an accurate picture of the situation of the Jews in the world. This would involve a study of both the economic and political problems of the Jew and the "internal" weakness of institutional and religious Jewish life.

II. To prepare and carry out a program for American Jewry based on the above analysis of the total Jewish problem. It is conceivable that such a program would include the following activities:

A. *American Program.*

1. Zionists must recognize the interdependence of the Jewish situation with the social and economic maladjustments of the country in which they live. American Zionists must actively support and participate in activities aimed to protect democracy and civil liberties, to improve the economic position of the people, and to fight fascism. Zionist education most certainly must include study of the problems facing democracy.

2. Zionists must recognize the fact that the continued existence of Jewish religious institutions and traditions is dependent on their fulfilling a definite need. Zionists must insist that Jewish communal organizations cease to serve vested interests and give their attention to the needs of the mass of Jews.

3. Zionists must recognize the value of the new Palestinian culture to the health of the diaspora Jewish communities and must facilitate conditions which will bring the diaspora and Palestine closer together. In particular, this means an emphasis on the study of Hebrew.

B. *World Jewish Program.*

1. Support of Palestine and its progressive social and cultural institutions.
2. Increased support of the Jewish National Fund.
3. Recognition of the menace of fascism to the Palestine Community. Zionists must participate in general anti-fascist boycott.
4. Support of institutions which are trying to alleviate the conditions of European Jewry.

Many Jews believe that Jewish groups and organizations should be concerned only with Jewish activities. They cannot understand why a Zionist group should be concerned with problems which confront every American citizen. They argue that the Jewish minority can have very little effect on the social trend in America.

The truth of the matter, however, is that democracies the world over are facing a serious test. The preservation of democracy will depend on the increased social maturity of its citizens. Most people who are outside the confines of educational institutions must therefore look to their own social and cultural groups for discussion of problems facing democracy. If Jewish groups are to concern themselves only with Jewish matters, they are neglecting a fundamental responsibility to the democracy in which they live.

In the last analysis, the future of the Zionist movement will depend not on providing a program aimed to attract a greater number of people, but upon the closer relation between Zionism and the realities of Jewish life in America.

The above program is presented with due acknowledgment to Avukah, the Reconstructionist movement, and other groups which are advocating similar programs for American Jewry.

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